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## Introduction

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# Introduction

by  
James Jennings

This special issue of the *Trotter Review* is devoted to a broad range of topics related to race, power, and voting. Although voting is a critically important political tool for black America, the vote does not necessarily guarantee that a group will enjoy power in society. At the same time that we seek greater rates of voter registration and turnout at all levels of the electoral process, we must also continue to struggle towards an agenda that delivers power to the black community.

The issue opens with an explanation of why statehood for Washington, D.C., should be a key item on the black agenda. Statehood could result in greater political influence for blacks. But, as Reverend Jesse Jackson reminds us, statehood for the District of Columbia is also important in ensuring that the nation practices what it preaches by adhering to the principles of a democratic society.

Although the national campaigns of both George Bush and Bill Clinton seem to be ignoring the role of black voters, Clarence Lusane describes how the black vote will remain a critical factor in determining the final outcome of the 1992 presidential election.

The shoddy treatment meted out to loyal black voters by many leaders in the Democratic party may encourage voters to “to go another way,” as pointed out by May Louie. She suggests that Bill Clinton has aggressively attempted to show white voters that he does not want to

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be overly associated with black voters if it means the loss of white voters' support.

As black America considers how to pursue the vote and gain power, it must appreciate the role of black women. Black women will play a very important role in determining the future of black politics. Journalist Dorothy Clark points out how this is consistent with the history of black women in American politics despite the fact that many barriers have existed to prevent black women from asserting themselves politically.

Historians James Green and Robert Hayden illustrate the important role of labor in the pursuit of black political power by examining briefly the life of Asa Philip Randolph. Based on interviews and research, Green and Hayden show how the labor activism of



blacks in the 1930s and 1940s was a critical element in the survival of the black community. Many of the gains made today in urban politics had their roots in the leadership and activism of individuals like Randolph.

To pursue the vote and power effectively also requires a technical understanding of the legal processes, procedures, and regulations governing the right to vote. Alex Willingham summarizes how the Reagan administration attempted to weaken the right and exercise of the vote by blacks. He gives many concrete examples of attempts to dilute the impact of black voting strength. Sheila Ards and Marjorie Lewis share with the reader a synopsis of how researchers determine the practice of minority vote dilution and suggest how such methods could be improved.

In 1992, again, the Republicans proposed that blacks should leave the Democratic party because the latter takes them for granted. The Democrats proposed that blacks cannot afford another national Republican administration. This is not a new debate. As suggested by William Monroe Trotter in the early 1900s, there may yet be a third way. Rather than support a Republican or a Democrat, Ron Daniels has decided to run for president. In the last article, Harold Horton, summarizes the views of this long-time, highly respected activist. Like a growing number of black activists, Daniels believes that only through a grassroots, independent candidacy can blacks effectively use the vote to gain greater political and economic power.

James Jennings is a professor of political science at the University of Massachusetts at Boston and director of the Trotter Institute. He is the author of *The Politics of Black Empowerment: The Transformation of Black Activism in Urban America*.